

110TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 732

To empower Peace Corps volunteers, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MARCH 1, 2007

Mr. DODD (for himself and Mr. KENNEDY) introduced the following bill; which
was read twice and referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations

A BILL

To empower Peace Corps volunteers, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Peace Corps Volunteer
5 Empowerment Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. TABLE OF CONTENTS.**

7 The table of contents for this Act is as follows:

Sec. 1. Short title.

Sec. 2. Table of contents.

TITLE I—PROMOTION OF PEACE CORPS PROJECTS AND GOALS

Sec. 101. Seed funding for volunteer projects.

Sec. 102. Charitable fundraising by Peace Corps volunteers.

Sec. 103. Programs and projects of returned Peace Corps volunteers to pro-
mote the goals of the Peace Corps.

Sec. 104. Recruitment of experienced volunteers.

Sec. 105. Digital Peace Corps.

TITLE II—EMPOWERMENT OF PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS

Sec. 201. Participation of Peace Corps volunteers in reviews of senior staff and programs.

Sec. 202. Volunteer Advisory Committees.

Sec. 203. Input of volunteers regarding site selection and training curriculum.

TITLE III—PERSONNEL ISSUES AND BENEFITS

Sec. 301. Reforms to medical screening process.

Sec. 302. Health insurance coverage for retirees who serve as Peace Corps volunteers.

Sec. 303. Report on costs associated with extending post-service health coverage.

Sec. 304. Sense of Congress on need for special rule for Peace Corps volunteers and employees in determining exclusion of gain from sale of principal residence.

Sec. 305. Treasury guidance regarding tax deductions.

Sec. 306. Protecting rights of Peace Corps volunteers.

Sec. 307. Financial guide for Peace Corps volunteers and applicants.

TITLE IV—AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS

Sec. 401. Authorization of appropriations.

1 **TITLE I—PROMOTION OF PEACE** 2 **CORPS PROJECTS AND GOALS**

3 **SEC. 101. SEED FUNDING FOR VOLUNTEER PROJECTS.**

4 (a) FINDINGS.—Congress makes the following find-
5 ings:

6 (1) The Peace Corps is an agency focused on
7 grassroots, bottom-up development.

8 (2) Seed funding for local demonstration
9 projects is crucial to the success of Peace Corps vol-
10 unteers.

11 (3) Demonstration projects are a very effective
12 method for Peace Corps volunteers to educate people
13 in host countries.

1 (b) FUNDING.—There is authorized to be appro-
2 priated up to 1 percent of the total amount appropriated
3 for the Peace Corps for fiscal year 2008 and each fiscal
4 year thereafter for seed funding for Peace Corps volun-
5 teers to carry out demonstration projects that have been
6 approved in advance by the Peace Corps Country Director
7 in the country where the volunteer is serving.

8 (c) SEED FUND AWARDS.—

9 (1) AVAILABILITY OF FUNDS.—The Director of
10 the Peace Corps shall determine at the beginning of
11 each fiscal year the amount of funding that will be
12 available as seed money for demonstration projects
13 for that fiscal year and inform each Country Direc-
14 tor of the portion of that amount that will be avail-
15 able to distribute to volunteers under the supervision
16 of such Country Director.

17 (2) AWARDING OF FUNDS.—The Director of the
18 Peace Corps shall promulgate rules pursuant to
19 which each Country Director may award seed funds
20 made available under this section to eligible Peace
21 Corp volunteers.

22 (3) ELIGIBILITY.—To be eligible for a seed
23 fund award under this subsection, a Peace Corps
24 volunteer shall—

1 (A) submit to the Country Director of the
2 country where the volunteer is serving a plan
3 for a demonstration project, including an expla-
4 nation of how the demonstration project will
5 lead to sustainable development; and

6 (B) make a written attestation that funds
7 awarded under this subsection are utilized for
8 the purposes specified in the plan.

9 (4) AMOUNT OF AWARDS.—A seed fund award
10 provided to a volunteer under this subsection may
11 not exceed \$1,000.

12 (5) REPORT.—Each Peace Corps volunteer who
13 receives a seed fund award under this subsection
14 shall submit to the Country Director of the country
15 where the volunteer is serving before the close of
16 such volunteer's service a report on the demonstra-
17 tion project funded by the award.

18 **SEC. 102. CHARITABLE FUNDRAISING BY PEACE CORPS**
19 **VOLUNTEERS.**

20 (a) SENSE OF CONGRESS ON ASSISTANCE IN FUND-
21 RAISING.—It is the sense of Congress that Peace Corps
22 volunteers should apply for grants and loans from non-
23 governmental organizations to carry out demonstration
24 projects, including by partnering with governmental and

1 nongovernmental agencies and working with host country
2 nationals.

3 (b) FUNDRAISING BY VOLUNTEERS.—

4 (1) AUTHORITY.—

5 (A) IN GENERAL.—Subject to subpara-
6 graph (B), Peace Corps volunteers are author-
7 ized to solicit contributions for demonstration
8 projects from persons personally known to
9 them, including family members, friends, and
10 members of their home community in the
11 United States, and from government and non-
12 governmental agencies, including by working
13 through the Peace Corps Partnership Program.
14 Any such solicitation shall state the demonstra-
15 tion project or projects to which contributed
16 funds will be applied.

17 (B) REQUIRED APPROVAL.—A Peace
18 Corps volunteer shall seek and receive advance
19 approval from the Country Director of the
20 country where the volunteer is serving before
21 exercising the authority under subparagraph
22 (A).

23 (2) ACCOUNTABILITY.—Peace Corps volunteers
24 receiving contributions pursuant to the authority
25 under paragraph (1) shall—

1 (A) maintain records and receipts to con-
 2 firm the proper application of contributed
 3 funds; and

4 (B) ensure that such funds are expended
 5 solely for the demonstration project or projects
 6 for which they were intended.

7 **SEC. 103. PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS OF RETURNED PEACE**
 8 **CORPS VOLUNTEERS TO PROMOTE THE**
 9 **GOALS OF THE PEACE CORPS.**

10 (a) PURPOSE.—The purpose of this section is to pro-
 11 vide support for returned Peace Corps volunteers to de-
 12 velop and carry out programs and projects to promote the
 13 third purpose of the Peace Corps Act, as set forth in sec-
 14 tion 2(a) of that Act (22 U.S.C. 2501(a)), relating to pro-
 15 moting an understanding of other peoples on the part of
 16 the American people.

17 (b) GRANTS TO CERTAIN NONPROFIT CORPORATIONS
 18 AND RETURNED PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS.—

19 (1) GRANT AUTHORITY.—The Director of the
 20 Peace Corps shall award grants on a competitive
 21 basis to private nonprofit corporations and returned
 22 Peace Corps volunteers for the purpose of enabling
 23 returned Peace Corps volunteers to use their knowl-
 24 edge and expertise to develop programs and projects
 25 to carry out the purpose described in subsection (a).

1 (2) PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS.—The programs
2 and projects that may receive grant funds under this
3 section include—

4 (A) educational programs designed to en-
5 rich the knowledge and interest of elementary
6 school and secondary school students in the ge-
7 ography and cultures of other countries where
8 the volunteers have served;

9 (B) projects that involve partnerships with
10 local libraries to enhance community knowledge
11 about other peoples and countries; and

12 (C) audiovisual projects that utilize mate-
13 rials collected by the volunteers during their
14 service that would be of educational value to
15 communities.

16 (3) ELIGIBILITY.—

17 (A) RETURNED PEACE CORPS VOLUN-
18 TEERS.—To be eligible for a grant under this
19 section, an individual who has served as a
20 Peace Corps volunteer shall have successfully
21 completed all aspects of the volunteer's required
22 Peace Corps service.

23 (B) NONPROFIT CORPORATIONS.—To be
24 eligible for a grant under this section, a non-
25 profit corporation shall have a board of direc-

tors composed of one or more returned Peace Corps volunteers with a background in community service, education, or health.

(C) REGULATIONS.—Not later than 60 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Director of the Peace Corps shall promulgate rules and guidelines as to the appropriate accounting and audit standards and other reporting requirements that must be adhered to by an individual or nonprofit corporation as a condition of eligibility to receive grants under this section.

(c) STATUS OF THE FUND.—Nothing in this section shall be construed to make any individual or nonprofit corporation supported under this section an agency or establishment of the Federal Government or to make any member of the board of directors or any officer or employee of such nonprofit corporation an officer or employee of the United States.

(d) CONGRESSIONAL OVERSIGHT.—Grant recipients under this section shall be subject to the appropriate oversight procedures of Congress.

(e) FUNDING.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—In addition to any other funds made available to the Peace Corps under any

1 other provision of law, there is authorized to be ap-
2 propriated for the Peace Corps for fiscal year 2008
3 and each fiscal year thereafter \$10,000,000 to carry
4 out this section.

5 (2) AVAILABILITY.—Amounts appropriated pur-
6 suant to paragraph (1) are authorized to remain
7 available until expended without regard to fiscal
8 year.

9 **SEC. 104. RECRUITMENT OF EXPERIENCED VOLUNTEERS.**

10 (a) FINDINGS.—Congress makes the following find-
11 ings:

12 (1) The vast majority of Peace Corps volunteers
13 have recently graduated from college.

14 (2) The Peace Corps should include among its
15 ranks more experienced individuals as Peace Corps
16 volunteers to help meet specific development needs
17 in certain countries and to serve as mentors for less
18 experienced volunteers.

19 (b) RECRUITMENT GOAL.—

20 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Director of the Peace
21 Corps shall set a goal of doubling by December 31,
22 2009, the number of Peace Corps volunteers with at
23 least 5 years of relevant work experience serving in
24 the Peace Corps and shall implement measures to
25 achieve such goal.

1 (2) REPORTS.—The Director shall periodically
2 report to Congress the progress made in achieving
3 the recruitment goal established pursuant to para-
4 graph (1).

5 (c) SURVEY OF EXPERIENCED VOLUNTEERS.—The
6 Director of the Peace Corps shall conduct, every 2 years,
7 a survey of Peace Corps volunteers with substantial work
8 experience who are serving in country to determine what
9 additional actions would reduce or eliminate disincentives
10 and barriers to service for Peace Corps volunteers with
11 substantial work experience.

12 (d) PLAN FOR ELIMINATING DISINCENTIVES.—The
13 Director of the Peace Corps shall direct a study on the
14 disincentives and barriers to service for Peace Corps vol-
15 unteers with substantial work experience and shall estab-
16 lish and report to Congress on a plan for eliminating such
17 disincentives and barriers. The plan shall include the de-
18 velopment and use of substantial written language cur-
19 riculum materials designed to facilitate the learning of for-
20 eign languages by Peace Corps volunteers with varying de-
21 grees of work experience and academic training.

22 (e) DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM.—The Director of
23 the Peace Corps shall designate for each of fiscal years
24 2008, 2009, and 2010 at least 20 sector-specific programs
25 in at least 20 different countries for which a minimum

1 of 5 years of relevant work experience shall be required
 2 of Peace Corps volunteers. The Director shall evaluate the
 3 issues that arise with respect to those programs as they
 4 are implemented and conducted.

5 **SEC. 105. DIGITAL PEACE CORPS.**

6 The Director of the Peace Corps shall establish a sys-
 7 tem for promoting, by electronic means, improved commu-
 8 nication among Peace Corps volunteers and staff, includ-
 9 ing the establishment of websites and e-mail links for use
 10 on a password-only basis by Peace Corps volunteers in
 11 country to discuss development strategies, funding
 12 sources, and other issues. All close of service reports shall
 13 be available on such websites or e-mail links.

14 **TITLE II—EMPOWERMENT OF**
 15 **PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS**

16 **SEC. 201. PARTICIPATION OF PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS**
 17 **IN REVIEWS OF SENIOR STAFF AND PRO-**
 18 **GRAMS.**

19 (a) REVIEWS OF SENIOR STAFF.—

20 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Director of the Peace
 21 Corps shall establish a mechanism for soliciting the
 22 views of Peace Corps volunteers serving in country
 23 regarding the support provided by senior staff. The
 24 information shall be kept confidential and reported
 25 to the appropriate Regional Peace Corps Directors.

1 (2) CONSIDERATION OF REVIEWS IN CONNEC-
 2 TION WITH CONTRACT DECISIONS.—The information
 3 collected pursuant to paragraph (1) shall be given
 4 appropriate weight in the decisionmaking process
 5 with respect to the extension of contracts for Coun-
 6 try Directors, Chief Administrative Officers, Peace
 7 Corps Medical Officers, and Associate Peace Corps
 8 Directors.

9 (b) REVIEWS OF PEACE CORPS PROGRAMS.—

10 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Director of the Peace
 11 Corps shall establish a mechanism for soliciting the
 12 views of Peace Corps volunteers serving in country
 13 regarding the design, effectiveness, and continued
 14 need for the programs in which they serve. The in-
 15 formation shall be kept confidential and reported to
 16 the appropriate Regional Peace Corps Directors.

17 (2) CONSIDERATION OF REVIEWS IN CONNEC-
 18 TION WITH PROGRAM DECISIONS.—The information
 19 collected pursuant to paragraph (1) shall be given
 20 appropriate weight in the decisionmaking process
 21 with respect to the design of, and continued need
 22 for, Peace Corps programs.

23 **SEC. 202. VOLUNTEER ADVISORY COMMITTEES.**

24 (a) IN GENERAL.—There shall be established in each
 25 country in which Peace Corps programs exist a Volunteer

1 Advisory Committee composed of representatives elected
 2 from among the volunteers serving in such country.

3 (b) DUTIES.—Each Volunteer Advisory Committee
 4 shall meet at least quarterly to make recommendations to
 5 the Country Director, Chief Administrative Officer, Asso-
 6 ciate Peace Corps Directors, and Peace Corps Medical Of-
 7 ficers serving in that country. The recommendations shall
 8 be forwarded to the Regional Peace Corps Director.

9 (c) RESPONSIVENESS TO RECOMMENDATIONS A FAC-
 10 TOR IN PERFORMANCE REVIEWS.—The responsiveness of
 11 the senior staff described in subsection (b) to Volunteer
 12 Advisory Committee recommendations shall be given ap-
 13 propriate weight in the decisionmaking process with re-
 14 spect to performance reviews and extensions of contracts.

15 **SEC. 203. INPUT OF VOLUNTEERS REGARDING SITE SELEC-**
 16 **TION AND TRAINING CURRICULUM.**

17 Associate Peace Corps Directors shall give substan-
 18 tial weight to the recommendations of Peace Corps volun-
 19 teers regarding—

- 20 (1) Peace Corps site selection, including the
 21 placement of additional or subsequent Peace Corps
 22 volunteers at existing sites; and
- 23 (2) the training curriculum for Peace Corps vol-
 24 unteers.

1 **TITLE III—PERSONNEL ISSUES**
2 **AND BENEFITS**

3 **SEC. 301. REFORMS TO MEDICAL SCREENING PROCESS.**

4 As part of the effort to recruit more experienced
5 Peace Corps volunteers, the director of the Peace Corps
6 shall reform the medical screening process used by the
7 Peace Corps. The reforms shall include the following
8 measures:

9 (1) Publication on the Internet website of the
10 Peace Corps the Medical Screening Guidelines used
11 by the Peace Corps, including a listing of—

12 (A) medical conditions that typically dis-
13 qualify individuals from serving as Peace Corps
14 volunteers; and

15 (B) medical conditions that typically lead
16 to a medical accommodation and a listing of
17 countries available to accept volunteers with
18 such medical accommodations.

19 (2) Establishment of a process for applicants
20 and other interested parties to propose changes to
21 the Medical Screening Guidelines.

22 (3) Establishment of a process allowing volun-
23 teers to appeal rejections on medical grounds, in-
24 cluding the right to base an appeal on the inad-
25 equacy of the Medical Screening Guidelines.

1 (4) Publication on the Internet website of the
 2 Peace Corps of a detailed description of the medical
 3 screening process applicable to Peace Corps volun-
 4 teers, including definitions of all applicable terms of
 5 art.

6 (5) Improved information for Peace Corps vol-
 7 unteers and applicants regarding the meaning and
 8 implications of failure to disclose medical informa-
 9 tion.

10 (6) Full reimbursement for medical tests re-
 11 quired by the Peace Corps of volunteers and appli-
 12 cants.

13 **SEC. 302. HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE FOR RETIREES**
 14 **WHO SERVE AS PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS.**

15 (a) FINDINGS.—Congress makes the following find-
 16 ings:

17 (1) Peace Corps volunteers, who receive health
 18 care benefits from the Peace Corps during their
 19 service, have the right, pursuant to regulations pro-
 20 mulgated by the Office of Personnel Management
 21 (subpart C of part 890 of title 5, Code of Federal
 22 Regulations), to suspend Federal health benefits cov-
 23 erage during their terms of service, when they re-
 24 ceive benefits provided by the Peace Corps, and re-
 25 sume enrollment when their service is complete.

1 (2) Peace Corps volunteers do not have the
2 same right of reenrollment with respect to health
3 benefits coverage provided by State and local govern-
4 ments, private entities, and other organizations,
5 which serves as a substantial financial disincentive
6 for retirees to serve as volunteers.

7 (b) REENROLLMENT PRIVILEGES.—The Director of
8 the Peace Corps shall seek to secure the right for Peace
9 Corps volunteers to suspend enrollment in retiree health
10 plans of State and local governments, private entities, and
11 other organizations during their terms of service and to
12 resume enrollment after completion of such service.

13 **SEC. 303. REPORT ON COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH EXTEND-**
14 **ING POST-SERVICE HEALTH COVERAGE.**

15 Not later than 90 days after the date of the enact-
16 ment of this Act, the Director of the Peace Corps shall
17 submit to Congress a report on the costs and policy issues
18 associated with extending the one-month period of health
19 coverage provided to Peace Corps volunteers upon comple-
20 tion of their terms of service by an additional 5 months.

1 **SEC. 304. SENSE OF CONGRESS ON NEED FOR SPECIAL**
2 **RULE FOR PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS AND**
3 **EMPLOYEES IN DETERMINING EXCLUSION OF**
4 **GAIN FROM SALE OF PRINCIPAL RESIDENCE.**

5 It is the sense of Congress that the Department of
6 the Treasury should propose and Congress should enact
7 legislation to provide tax treatment related to gain from
8 sales of principal residence by Peace Corps volunteers dur-
9 ing their period of active service that is similar to the
10 treatment given members of the uniformed services and
11 the foreign service.

12 **SEC. 305. TREASURY GUIDANCE REGARDING TAX DEDUC-**
13 **TIONS.**

14 The Secretary of the Treasury shall, in consultation
15 with the Director of the Peace Corps, publish guidance
16 with respect to expenses which may be deducted from
17 gross income that are pertinent to individuals enrolled as
18 volunteers or volunteer leaders under the Peace Corps Act
19 (22 U.S.C. 2501 et seq.).

20 **SEC. 306. PROTECTING RIGHTS OF PEACE CORPS VOLUN-**
21 **TEERS.**

22 (a) CONDUCT SUBJECT TO TERMINATION.—The Di-
23 rector of the Peace Corps shall ensure that Peace Corps
24 volunteers are subject to administrative separation only
25 for specific conduct violations specified in section 204 of

1 the Peace Corps Manual and that volunteers are made
2 fully aware of the consequences of such violations.

3 (b) WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION.—The Director
4 of the Peace Corps shall ensure that Peace Corps volun-
5 teers reporting the misconduct of Peace Corps staff or ad-
6 vocating for reforms are treated in accordance with the
7 provisions of chapter 23 of title 5, United States Code,
8 prohibiting certain personnel practices (commonly referred
9 to as whistleblower protection provisions).

10 (c) RIGHT TO PUBLISH WITHOUT PRIOR AP-
11 PROVAL.—

12 (1) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in para-
13 graph (2), Peace Corps volunteers shall not be re-
14 quired to submit stories, articles, or other material
15 they publish to Country Directors for prior approval.

16 (2) EXCEPTION RELATED TO COUNTRY-SPE-
17 CIFIC MATERIAL.—

18 (A) APPROVAL REQUIREMENT.—A Peace
19 Corps volunteer shall be required to submit to
20 a Country Director for review and prior ap-
21 proval any stories, articles, or other material
22 that the volunteer intends to publish that relate
23 specifically to the Peace Corps program oper-
24 ating in the country where the volunteer is serv-

1 ing or to policies or actions by officials of the
 2 government of such country.

3 (B) RIGHT TO APPEAL.—The decision of a
 4 Country Director regarding material submitted
 5 for approval under subparagraph (A) shall be
 6 appealable to the Regional Peace Corps Direc-
 7 tor.

8 **SEC. 307. FINANCIAL GUIDE FOR PEACE CORPS VOLUN-**
 9 **TEERS AND APPLICANTS.**

10 The Peace Corps shall publish a financial guide for
 11 Peace Corps volunteers and applicants regarding how to
 12 manage finances in the United States while serving
 13 abroad.

14 **TITLE IV—AUTHORIZATION OF**
 15 **APPROPRIATIONS**

16 **SEC. 401. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.**

17 Section 3(b)(1) of the Peace Corps Act (22 U.S.C.
 18 2502(b)(1)) is amended to read as follows:

19 “(1) There are authorized to be appropriated to carry
 20 out the purposes of this Act \$336,000,000 for fiscal year
 21 2008, \$380,000,000 for fiscal year 2009, \$450,000,000
 22 for fiscal year 2010, and \$618,000,000 for fiscal year
 23 2011.”.

